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WITH LES WHITTEN

WASHINGTON—Before Rogers Morton left the Interior Department, Sen. Paul Fannin, R.-Ariz., called upon him as one Republican to another for a small favor.

The senator wanted the Kofa Game Range in Arizona taken away from the Fish and Wildlife Service and put under the sole jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management.

The latter has a reputation for being soft on land development. Environmentalists therefore, suspected that some powerful developers were behind the move and that the BLM would open the range for mining and other commercial uses.

Morton's advisers opposed giving the range to the BLM, but Morton overruled them. "It's the least I can do for Paul Fannin," he was heard to say.

Environmentalists have alerted Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., who is investigating the transfer. He has found that all the staff memos at the Interior Department favored keeping the range under only Fish and Wildlife jurisdiction. The two agencies shared jurisdiction in the past.

A spokesman for Morton said the former Interior Secretary might have made the comment about Fannin but doesn't recall it. Morton decided to turn the range over the the BLM because the local citizens wanted it that way, said the spokesman. The same point was made by a spokesman for Fannin.

But the environmentalists are convinced that the decision was made so developers, who support Fannin, can get their hands on the land.

STRANGE HOST: The brother of New Orleans underworld boss Carlos Marcello has sworn that the State Department has used him as an "official host at several luncheons and dinners in honor of influential and important international dignitaries."

Joe Marcello Jr., made the claim in an appeal for liquor licenses for Broussard's Restaurant, which he hopes to operate in New Orleans' famous French Quarter.

Although he has no criminal record himself, his brother Carlos is identified in federal files as "the top ranking member of the Mafia in the New Orleans area." Joe Marcello's application was turned down, therefore, because of his "character and reputation."

In his appeal, he contended that "by being called upon to be his country's official host to foreign leaders in world affairs (he) has served his country, state and city in a capacity that can be claimed by few in this country."

For this service, he swore, he "has been officially afforded the highest compliments and accolades of the United States State Department."

We can find no record at the State Department that Marcello has ever been used as an "official host." We have established that distinguished visitors have been taken to the Elmwood Plantation, another restaurant he operates in the New Orleans area. They were brought to the restaurant, however, by volunteer hosts, not by any arrangement with the State Department.

WASHINGTON WHIRL: Some political advisers are urging President Ford to let the Republican convention choose his running mate next year. Sources close to the President tell us, however, that he will insist on keeping Vice President Nelson Rockefeller on the ticket...

—Ex-Vice President Spiro Agnew has gone into Nixon-like seclusion in a fashionable neighborhood near Annapolis. The Agnew family refuses to talk to reporters and has little to do with its neighbors. Close friends say the proud Agnew is waiting for the right time to tell his story and clear his name.

—The Secret Service gave approval for Hollywood to film part of the Watergate movie "All the President's Men," on the White House grounds. Then Robert Redford, the star of the picture began lobbying between takes against the President on the strip-mining bill. All of a sudden, the moviemakers were no longer welcome at the White House. It may have been a coincidence, Redford told us...

—The CIA has received solid evidence from Cambodia that "over 100 military and civilian personnel who fought or served on the side of the Lon Nol government were killed in one northwestern provincial capital." The CIA also has "reasonably firm evidence that similar large-scale killings occurred in two other northwestern provincial capitals"...

—Defense Secretary James Schlesinger has ordered a secret review of the Japanese-American military alliance. He hopes to improve military cooperation...

— A ceremony honoring Julian Price, the Army-Air Force Exchange's purchasing chief, for his "humanitarianism" was called off after we discovered that contractors doing business with him had been pressured to pay $175 a head to attend...

—The Securities and Exchange Commission is looking into an alleged scheme by a large securities dealer to maneuver 150 of his employes through their dealers' exams fraudulently. The Internal Revenue Service is also investigating reports that the firm's president dipped into company funds for parties, a girl friend and campaign contributions. He denies the charges.